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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001811

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2019
TAGS: IR IZ PHUM PINR PREL PTER
SUBJECT: GOI PLANS ULTIMATUM TO CLOSE ASHRAF

REF: BAGHDAD 1699 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Acting Political-Military Counselor W.S. Reid for reason s 1.4(b-d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a series of meetings between GOI and USG officials last week, the GOI committee responsible for the Mujahedin-e-Khalq's Camp Ashraf appeared increasingly intent on closing Camp Ashraf. GOI officials informed acting Pol-Mil Couns that plans are underway to enter the camp, establish a police presence, and transfer the camp residents to another location away from the border with Iran. A visit by Iranian Ambassador Qomi to the GOI committee to accuse the MEK of infiltrating Iran from Camp Ashraf contributed to an escalation of tensions over Ashraf following the Iranian elections (reftel). We reminded GOI Ashraf Committee Chairman Ali Abdul Amir al-Yassery of the humanitarian assurances provided by the GOI to the USG and urged the committee to work with the Ashraf residents to reach a mutually agreeable solution. Based on recent discussions between Ashraf leadership and Emboffs, without such an agreement, the residents would likely refuse to move, setting up a potential violent confrontation between the GOI and Ashraf residents.
End Summary.

¶2. (C) On June 29, Emboffs and MNF-I TF134 CG met with al-Yassery regarding the GOI's refusal of entry of humanitarian supplies into Camp Ashraf. Al-Yassery denied the claim, stating that diesel fuel, which was possibly obtained illegally and could be used to create a humanitarian crisis, was the only supply being denied entry. CG TF-134 rebutted al-Yassery saying that U.S. forces personally witnessed the denial of food and water into the camp by the Iraqi Army (IA).

¶3. (C) Appearing to shift the discussion, al-Yassery questioned the role of U.S. military forces in Camp Ashraf, stating he opposed the idea of U.S. military forces inside the camp and claimed &it is impossible for two forces to be inside the same base.⁸ He claimed that PM Maliki has decided that U.S. forces need to leave Camp Ashraf. CG TF-134 assured him that U.S. forces were in the camp in an oversight capacity to monitor the humanitarian situation. Al-Yassery then appeared to step back from his earlier statements, claiming U.S. forces could remain in the camp, but there needed to be a determination of which force had authority over the camp. CG TF-134 reiterated that the GOI has authority over Camp Ashraf and that U.S. forces are merely serving in an oversight capacity, per the agreement contained in an exchange of diplomatic notes between the USG and the GOI.

¶4. (C) Playing on the sovereignty theme, al-Yassery reiterated the GOI's desire to place an Iraqi police station (IPS) at Camp Ashraf, stating the station would include 800 Iraqi police officers (IP) and would be introduced whether or not the residents agreed. CG TF-134 indicated that forcing the issue on the residents could set off a humanitarian crisis. Al-Yassery seemed to discount this scenario, stating the GOI has a plan in place. He suggested that he agrees with USG officials regarding offering some type of temporary

residency status to camp residents if they agreed to allow GOI officials to enter, and ultimately close the camp, moving the residents to another location in Iraq. He also appeared to agree with our suggestion to limit the number of IP to about 100, increasing at some future date, once trust had been established.

¶15. (C) Regarding an alternative location for camp residents, al-Yassery claimed the GOI would like to move the residents Qal-Yassery claimed the GOI would like to move the residents to Samawa, near the Saudi Arabian border. He also said he would consider Camp Echo in Diwaniyah as an alternative location, provided the camp was of adequate size and could accommodate the residents and GOI authorities.

¶16. (C) At the end of the meeting, al-Yassery requested that the next scheduled trip to Camp Ashraf by the Committee and USG officials be postponed in order to allow the situation to cool off. He indicated that he does not want to go to Ashraf prematurely because he intends to issue an ultimatum with a strict timetable for opening the police station, USG officials agreed to delay the visit.

¶17. (C) On July 1, acting Pol-Mil Couns and Emboffs met again with al-Yassery, following a short-notice request from his office. Al Yassery said he had met with Iranian Ambassador Qomi regarding Camp Ashraf. In this meeting, Qomi claimed that on June 15, 10 members of the camp departed the camp escorted by U.S. forces. He claimed the residents crossed the border into Iran, led anti-election demonstrations, and returned to the camp two days later. Qomi claimed this was evidence of USG interference in internal Iranian affairs and asked the GOI to look into the matter. Al-Yassery said he informed Qomi that Iraqi forces had given him no indication that any such thing had happened. Acting Pol-Mil Couns Reid assured al-Yassery that accusations were scurrilous and

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reiterated that the USG respects Iranian sovereignty. (Note: We have since confirmed that the report is baseless and informed al-Yassery of that fact. End Note.)

¶18. (C) Al-Yassery also informed USG officials that he sent a representative to the camp to make sure that humanitarian items were being allowed entry into the camp, as a result of the last meeting. His representative reported that camp residents were dressed in military uniforms (Note: This is plausible per U.S. observations of camp activity. End Note.) and driving military vehicles (Note: possibly dual-use trucks, we estimate, not armored vehicles. End Note.) and that GOI signs in Arabic language recently placed on the buildings had been replaced with Farsi signage. He stated it now looks more like Iranian soil than Iraqi, and this would anger the Iraqi public if it became known.

¶19. (C) Al-Yassery stated that GOI officials will travel to Camp Ashraf on July 7 to inform camp residents that the GOI will be entering the camp to begin the transfer of residents to another location. He told acting Pol-Mil Couns that the GOI was leaning toward Camp Echo as the relocation site. (Note: TF-134 still is assessing whether Camp Echo could be ready as soon as the GOI would like and whether it would be adequate in size and services to house the entire 3400 Ashraf population. End Note.) He revealed the transfer process will start on July 12 and will take approximately one month, hoping to complete the transfer by August. Following the transfer, the GOI would then engage in negotiations with the residents regarding possible resettlement locations abroad. He added that the UNHCR and the ICRC would have offices at the MEK location site to facilitate this next step on status.

¶10. (C) Embassy officials reminded al-Yassery that the GOI had committed to the USG to treat Ashraf residents humanely and that their cooperation in any transfer would be necessary to avoid inhumane treatment. Emboffs suggested the GOI use an inducement to obtain voluntary agreement from the residents to relocate within Iraq, possibly offering temporary residency status in Iraq. Al-Yassery countered, &In our law, there is no volunteer,⁸ and restated this would all be discussed once the residents transfer out of Camp Ashraf.

¶11. (C) Al-Yassery also pointed out that once residents

transfer, U.S. military forces will not be allowed to co-locate on the new camp and that USG officials would have to request access to fulfill their oversight role under the agreement. He stated he did not want U.S. forces to take part in these visits and did not interpret the agreement between the USG and the GOI to include a physical oversight presence by U.S. military forces. He also reiterated that the PM did not want U.S. forces inside the camp.

¶12. (C) USG officials originally planned to travel to Camp Ashraf to inform the residents about the GOI's plans on July 2, per al-Yassery's specific request. The trip however was cancelled due to weather conditions. USG officials now plan to travel with GOI officials to Camp Ashraf on July 7 to try to defuse the current situation and assist the parties to come to a mutually agreed upon solution.

¶13. (C) Comment. It is clear that the GOI is intent on moving the MEK from Camp Ashraf, increasingly even by force, if necessary. The allegations made by the Iranian Ambassador have added fuel to an already combustible issue. We plan to remind Camp Ashraf residents that we have no basis to object or remind Camp Ashraf residents that we have no basis to object to the GOI's plans to close Camp Ashraf, as long as it moves the residents humanely in accordance with Iraq's laws, constitution, and international obligations. We will remind the GOI that it does not have the capacity to move the residents humanely should they elect not to cooperate voluntarily. If both sides are not convinced of the need to reach a mutually agreeable solution, a confrontation will likely cost lives, damage the reputation of the GOI in international opinion, set back Iraqi's efforts to normalize its relations with international organizations, and put strains on the Iraqi-U.S. bilateral partnership. End Comment.

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